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The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Seniors Jaime Yu and Anjali Asthagiri attend UMERC conference

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Senior Ava Criniti signs letter of intent.

Volume LXV Issue I — November 2022

LHS Teacher Contracts Still In Negotiations

■ Siya Setty
Allison Ma
Staff Writers

On Oct. 25, teachers and students alike expressed their concerns regarding the absence of active teacher contracts during the Lexington High School committee meeting.

The meeting underscored an issue for teachers that has persisted since the start of the 22-23 school year. Teachers have been working without active contracts, which has left them dealing with an overwhelming number of students, lack of COVID-19 sick leave, and insufficient salary increases not fully adjusted to the rising inflation rates. To raise awareness about the situation, teachers and students have been wearing red on Tuesdays.

When the Lexington Educators Association (LEA) polled staff, they found an equal amount of concerns regarding compensation and workload.

"This is unusual, in my experience, to have it split fifty-fifty. [It shows how] stressed folks are about workload," Dr. Avon Lewis, LEA president, said.

Currently, math and social studies teachers teach up to 125 students or about five courses. Feeling overworked by the number of students they teach, many teachers are bargaining for all secondary teachers to have a cap of 100 students across four courses.

"Post pandemic, education is changing, the needs of students are changing, and meeting the needs of individual students is more important than it's ever been. But having 125 students means I have a lot of individual needs that need to be met," Kelly Anderson, a math teacher and avid spokesperson for reducing teacher workload, said.

Additionally, teachers have limited prep time allocated to plan lessons and prepare materials for their classes. This has interfered with their ability to help students outside of class time.

Another critical issue is the absence of COVID-19 sick leave for teachers. Previously, teachers were given five days of COVID-19 sick leave that did not count towards their accrued sick leave count.

"Teachers really want to keep that as long as the pandemic is here, where basically COVID is its own category. It doesn't count against sick leave. And our administration, as far as I understand, would prefer that teachers do have to use sick leave, if they're taking any sort of medical related absence, including COVID," Kerry Dunne, LHS History Department Head, said.

The absence of COVID-19 leave for teachers means they would need to use their accumulated sick days if they or a dependent contract COVID, leaving fewer sick days available for other medical leave in the future. This could lead to teachers taking unpaid time off or coming to school sick.

An even more pressing issue may be the lack of salary increases for teachers.

"I'd say the biggest thing for sure, is money. Teachers typically are pushing pretty hard to get a two percent or maybe three percent cost of living increase. But right now, the cost of inflation is seven or eight percent," Dunne said.

Due to the high cost of living in Lexington, many teachers cannot find housing in or near Lexington. This has, in turn, increased commute time. Commuting long distances on a daily basis may be a deal-breaker for some of her new hires, leaving Dunne worried about retention.

Many students are advocating alongside teachers for the renewal of active contracts. Anjali Agarwal, an LHS senior, was one of the first students to publicize the situation as a speaker at the school committee meeting. She has spoken about the stress teachers face when working without a contract, and how it impacts the school's success, teacher livelihood, and quality of students' education. She and Nathaniel Dvorkin, another LHS senior, have prioritized student solidarity surrounding the situation.

"By refusing to acknowledge that there were actual systemic problems that teachers are facing, that by design, [teachers] don't have the capacity to be the best educators they can be…we [students] are suffering because of it, too," Agarwal said.

Students who have seen their teachers struggle without an active contract believe that these issues have impacted more than just their school day.

"They cannot do their jobs effectively, they cannot be healthy. Teachers are literally deteriorating, their health in all aspects is deteriorating, because they don't have the protections they need, because they don't have a valid contract, and because they're asked to do so much more than what is required of them," Dvorkin said.

At the time this article went to press, contract negotiations were still ongoing.

Dermans Contribute to Lowering Student Stress

■ Sarah Chen
Nikki Prasad
Staff Writers

As students are settling down into schoolwork, stuffed dinosaurs have also been settling down in math classrooms. The multicolor plushies were originally purchased for fun, but have gained massive school-wide appeal. Since last year, Precalculus classes have slowly been acquiring dinosaur stuffed animals and naming them Derman in reference to the beloved math textbook character.

The appearance of Dermans started when Precalculus teachers recognized the positive impact having Dermans in the classroom had on students.

"Originally, Derman was a large stuffed dinosaur that I got last year that my students wanted to meet in person. So I decided to buy an 'in school' version. He then became so popular that many other math teachers decided to purchase their own Dermans, so we have a yellow one, a pink one, and a blue one," Michaela Tracy, a Lexington High School math teacher, said.

Many students were already familiar with the Derman from their work in math class using textbooks, so it wasn't a surprise the stuffed dinosaur was named "Derman."

"Derman is one of the characters who works with Tony and Sasha on math problems. My students really identified with Derman last year so they voted to name the dinosaur Derman," Tracy said.

Dermans are now being crocheted, and as Dermans are becoming more accessible, students can request to keep one on their desks during assessments.

"It's just some small spark of joy in some way. Whether that's lowering stress or not, I'm not 100 percent sure, but what I will say is that it's just a quick reminder that someone believes in you. Derman is representing the fact that we believe in you to be successful," Tracy said.

Many students believe that using Dermans in the classroom makes math more manageable and enjoyable.

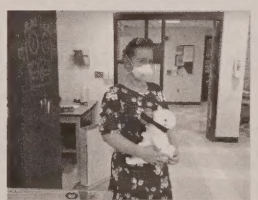
"Especially last year, preparing for finals, we had what was called a daily Derman, which is basically a daily do-now problem, but it was a fun addition—something to look forward to," Laura Yoo, a senior, said.

Since last year, the love for Derman has taken off. Derman-themed merchandise created by the LHS robotics teams, including last year's Derman stickers by The Parity Bits and the ongoing 3D-printed Derman fundraiser by 2 Bits and a Byte, continues to contribute to its rising popularity.

"We're hoping to spread the Derman love to more people and have more access to Dermans for a very low price," Tracy said.

Dermans make students want to thrive and do better, show students that so much is possible, and bring in more positivity.

"I think it just kind of reduces the expectation that math is serious, always hard, there's no mercy, everything is black and white, but you can still have fun and enjoy your time in math. Dermans are just a way to bring a little more fun into the classrooms," Yoo said.



Ms. Tracy and Derman helps out student in math class.
Photo by Vikram Anantha

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Ida's Insights: The LHS Art System

Ida Sjodin
Columnist

Students at Lexington High School should not be required to take a prerequisite Foundations of Arts class. At LHS, the two foundational art classes are Foundations of Fine Arts (FOFA) and Foundations of Digital Arts (FODA). These classes cover a broad spectrum of topics, giving students an introduction to the world of art. It is a prerequisite for more advanced art classes such as painting, photography, illustration, and more.

There are several issues regarding the requirement to take a Foundations class, as many students, including me, already have a lot of experience in fine arts and digital arts. Although a freshman, I have already been learning about art outside of school for many years. I have spent a lot of time improving my drawing and painting skills and experimenting with new mediums. These are things that Foundations classes aim to do, and it becomes problematic when it repeats what many people already know.

In the math department, for example, many freshmen take placement tests because they already know the content. It would be boring for these students to take Math 2 if they already know everything being taught. Foundations of Arts could be structured in a similar way.

To clarify, I do not think Foundations classes are unnecessary; they just aren't as helpful to students who have practiced art independently and would learn more in advanced art classes.

I am currently enrolled in FOFA, and the curriculum is very familiar to what students have already learned in middle school.

Furthermore, some students already know what medium they prefer, but cannot concentrate on it due to FOFA' broad focus. For example, let's say that someone loves illustration. They've been doing it for years, and know that it is something they would like to pursue in their career. If they can't access art classes outside of school, they might want to immediately go into an illustration class at LHS, but they can't since they are required to go through a Foundations class first. It may seem like a very small problem, but if it isn't always necessary, why should students be required to take it?

Another problem arises for students in their later years of high school, especially seniors: with a required Foundations class, their options for electives are very narrow. If a senior has a lot of art experience and would like to learn more about a certain element of art before they graduate, they only have the time to go through an entire beginning-level class.

The main issue with Foundations of Arts Classes is that the class is too broad for students who already have a targeted concentration or want to further explore specific mediums. Like the school's Math and Language levels, the Visual Arts department should allow intermediate and advanced students to test out of the FOFA classes and pursue art according to their skill level.

Roger's Reflections: The Return to In-Person Debate

Roger Li
Columnist

In-person debate is returning after over two years of being online. Prior to the pandemic, students on the Lexington debate team would travel to compete at tournaments. Now, debaters face opponents in-person one week and compete on Zoom the next. As a second-year debater, I have had the opportunity to experience "both worlds."

Online debate does have its benefits. Tournaments are less costly because we don't have to pay for hotel rooms, plane tickets, or bus fees. Last year, I could attend any tournament I wanted to, and this flexibility contributed to Lexington Debate's strong performance. Smaller programs around the country were also able to participate in high-level national circuit tournaments for the first time, increasing the accessibility of debate as an activity.

However, surprisingly, the increased availability of online debate has lowered participation. I know many people who don't want to spend time debating online when other activities are in-person. Consequently, participation in tournaments decreased during the pandemic. Even successful debaters didn't want to continue competing online convinced that debate wouldn't recover. However, sign-ups for debate classes have rebounded this year.

Personally, I had fun competing last year from the comfort of my own home. By having more opportunities to face different debaters, I improved my own argumentative skills. But after a few months, debate started to get boring. I would spend the weekend stumbling through grueling debate rounds, with no one to celebrate my wins or help me recover after a loss. That's why I wasn't surprised when many of last year's seniors, despite being extremely successful, decided to quit after being burned out. Many of this year's seniors are participating in mostly in-person tournaments, since competing virtually isn't worth it anymore.

In-person debate is just more enjoyable than online debate. When you go to debate camp over the summer, you spend weeks practicing debate with high-quality instructors and making connections with people you'll meet at tournaments later in the season. Friendships are built and maintained through in-person interactions at in-person tournaments. Additionally, team bonding is much stronger when you're sitting next to your teammates rather than texting in a group chat. Even if there are more opportunities to be successful in online debate, in-person debate is of much higher quality. That's why the debate program is trying to give this year's seniors as many in-person opportunities as possible, since they missed over two years of this experience.

However, having online tournaments available is still beneficial. Some schools can only afford to attend a few high-level national tournaments a year, so having a three-tournament series that can qualify people for the Tournament of Champions, the most prestigious national tournament, is a great way to increase accessibility.

However, the last two and a half years have proven that online debate is not sustainable. That's why I, along with so many other debaters, are excited for the return to in-person debate.

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Should There Be School on Cultural Holidays?

■ Mrigank Dhingra
Avni Rathi
Staff Writers

Every year, students show support for major cultural holidays, such as Diwali and Lunar New Year. On Oct. 24, for example, numerous students dressed in Indian attire to celebrate Diwali. Many students believe that Asian cultural holidays warrant a day off on the Lexington Public Schools calendar.

"Diwali wasn't just an average Monday, it was a huge holiday that we were all celebrating and taking part in," Tiara Biswas, a junior, said.

Christian and Jewish holidays are typically permitted days off because many staff members and students observe these holidays. Since LHS has a large Asian student population, some believe the school should also represent Asian cultural observances.

"43 percent of this school is Asian," Biswas said. "You look at any class in LHS and a huge amount of people will be Asian… There is no such understanding for other cultural holidays, even though such a big part of our school population is Asian."

Biswas says that the lack of acknowledgment of Asian holidays harms students.

"We have these [holidays] that we need to participate in and having school on these events on the same day hinders that," Biswas said.

Cultural holidays allow people to embrace their roots and celebrate at home with family and friends. However, many cannot plan and participate in these events because of the stress from courseloads.

"It's supposed to be a holiday," Biswas said.

However, when homework is given on the day of a cultural observance, some teachers still expect it to be completed. As a result, students are forced to choose between celebrating their culture and identity or falling behind on classwork and homework.

Administrators have noticed that students are disappointed about how cultural observances are allocated and acknowledge that not all cultural observances are given days off.

"I think we're always going to be in that position, no matter what," Johnny Cole, Director of Equity & Student Support, said. "When you look at the list of observances, we would never have school."

While the school cannot add or remove holidays to the school calendar, administrators have tried to create a fairer environment for all students by not specifying whether a day off is a federal or religious holiday and creating a list of observances that are important to the community.

"At least by removing the terminology on the calendar, there was a little less favoritism happening towards one group over another," Cole said.

Students at LHS dress up for Diwali.
Photo by Vikram Anantha

It is important for the administration to directly acknowledge a wider array of cultural holidays as they are celebrations of identity. Beyond giving holidays a day off, this can entail sending out email blasts when there is a cultural holiday, announcing observances during morning announcements, or putting up decorations throughout the school for these celebrations.

At LHS, where uniqueness is celebrated, students deserve greater cultural and religious representation.

LHS Moves to "Unlevel" English Classes: Good or Bad?

■ Sejal Mammai
Maya Bhandhakar
Staff Writers

While current sophomores and juniors are split up into College Prep (CP) and Honors English classes after freshman year, teachers at Lexington High School have developed a proposal that may change this system: the Honors-For-All initiative. Honors-For-All, or unleveling, is the process of keeping all students in the same class level regardless of needs, strengths, or background. The Honors-For-All initiative should be implemented as it promotes inclusive practices and positive mental health within the LHS community.

Melissa Soule, Sophie Blum, and Joshua Olivier-Mason, LHS English teachers and members of the Honors-For-All committee, helped roll out the initiative that was originally pioneered by the LHS English Department in 2019. Along with a volunteer group of students and administrators, the Honors-For-All committee includes four other English teachers—Abigail Chaffer, Carrie Conlon, Jane Day, and Taylor Liljegren. Dr. Hackett and Principal Stephens also expressed their support for the initiative this year.

"[The initiative is] a better representation of what we are actually doing in English classrooms at LHS," Chaffer, an honors English teacher, said. "It shows us that more diversity in thought and ability and the way that people go about their work is actually really beneficial in classrooms."

The difference between honors classes and CP1 classes has been unclear to many students recently.

"I chose to take CP1 instead of honors English because I felt that the honors class would be too difficult for me since CP1 has already been challenging me," Laila Layous, a sophomore and CP1 English student, said.

Prior to the pandemic, Honors students would read higher-level texts, write more papers, and cover more content than a CP English class. However, Honors courses have become less intensive over the past decade, especially since the pandemic. Consequently, classes have become more flexible, and the number of students in Honors has increased significantly.

As teachers have redefined what a 'successful' student looks like, the selection process for Honors English has changed. Before, teachers used a grade-based system but now view students more holistically, taking into account the students' engagement level and enthusiasm.

At a typical high school, honors-level English classes are restricted to 25 percent of the whole class; at LHS, over 60 percent of the junior class is placed in Honors American Literature. Honors-for-All is a reasonable next step in an already inclusive department.

Alexia D'Souza, a sophomore and honors English student, doesn't feel that there is a difference between the workload in CP and Honors. However, she did note that students in the Honors courses seemed more engaged in the course material and class discussions, creating a positive classroom atmosphere.

"It's really exciting to be able to walk into a classroom knowing that you are surrounded by people who are as passionate as you about something," D'Souza said.

Many students at LHS choose to take English at the honors level due to the school's competitive environment. Students are under pressure to take more Honors and Advanced Placement courses to demonstrate academic rigor in college applications.

However, some students at the honors level decide to take the accelerated course to improve their writing skills.

"I felt like I needed to elevate the quality of my writing and learning alike. I thought an accelerated course would help me push myself and rekindle the love of reading I had lost to other academic distractions," D'Souza said.

Unleveling English classes would allow students of disadvantaged backgrounds to gain more experience in higher-level classes, while promoting a positive learning environment at LHS.

"[Leveling] resegregates diverse communities. Not only is tracking detrimental to students, but it's also not in line with the core values of the district, if indeed we value diversity, curiosity, and learning from folks who are different from us," Blum said.

The Honors-For-All initiative aims to promote inclusivity and prioritize students' mental health within LHS's competitive academic environment.

Should LHS Bring Back the Wall of Rejection?

Izzi Schulte
■ Laura Yang
Staff Writers

Once again, Lexington High School seniors will not have the Wall of Rejection during their college admissions journeys. In 2020, the LHS administration rejected the Wall of Rejection, an in-person and online bulletin board where students could reframe college rejection in a humorous light. The school has maintained its decision due to the profanity in student comments and difficulty monitoring the board.

During the 2019-2020 school year in Commons I, students posted their rejection letter on the Wall of Rejection. Within days, the letter would be marked with jokes about the college.

By easing anxiety around the college application process, the Wall helps boost student morale and mental health.

"I think it would help fight the anxiety for people who are seniors who have gone through the process to show them that everybody gets rejected and it's just a part of the process," Kimaya Bhangle, a sophomore, said.

Bhangle isn't the only member of LHS with this appreciation for the Wall.

"I think it would make me feel better about the college rejection letters I received that year, even if it is anonymous," Tasbia Uddin, another sophomore, said.

Teachers present when the Wall of Rejection was still around believe that it successfully encouraged students during the college process.

"The intention was empowering, the actual effect would be tough to say for sure, but it's communal pain rather than individual pain," Christopher Doucette, the advisor of the LHS Senate, said.

In addition to reducing anxiety, the Wall also empowered students not to fear failure when applying.

"I think it would help keep people's motivation up, and it would make people motivated to apply to 'reach colleges,'" Uddin said.

However, concerns about the strong language used towards admissions officers and educational institutions ultimately led to the removal of the Wall.

"Honestly, it's a big possibility that [vandalism] could happen. We are high schoolers, after all… But if someone makes sure there isn't anything negative, that's great too. The positives would outweigh the negatives overall," Bhangle said.

Doucette notes how difficult it was to monitor the board and vet the jokes and drawings made on the board.

"The reality is it would require extensive supervision," Doucette said. "Someone could be in an after school event and write something on there, and it shows up the next day, people freak out. So, not likely to have that level of supervision, and no one wanted to take it on for that, like, bang for the buck was not worth it."

LHS school culture is often described as competitive and cutthroat. By addressing the reality of failure, the Wall offered students a chance to cathartically destress and tackle their feelings head-on with humor.

Women's Literature Class Showcases Symbolic Gothic Art

■ Allison Liu
Sophia Zhang
Staff Writers

A dimly lit display case in the main lobby holds Gothic artwork recently crafted by the students in Taylor Liljegren's Women's Literature class. Lifeless flowers drained of their color mirror women who have been suffocated by unachievable beauty standards. A ghost draped in a luminous white veil dangles from the ceiling, and black-and-white portraits hang on the walls.

These Gothic elements are inspired by Charlotte Brontë's novel, Jane Eyre, and represent how women are perceived in society. Through the book's dark writing, students can explore the perspectives of women in the 19th century and their struggles in being confined to the domestic sphere. Gothic literature was first developed in Britain and is characterized by its dark and frightful concepts.

"At the heart of the Gothic movement is the relationship between fear and attraction— the vibe that is created when both of these things meet, [and] the juxtaposition of the two things that enhance the stakes of each other," Liljegren said.

Although not explicit at first, Gothic literature and the progression of women's societal standings are interconnected.

"The Gothic genre gave space for female writers to talk about their own societal and sexual desires/anxieties in a safe way– a fear of the trappings of domesticity is easily translated into a story about living in a haunted house with a strange man," Liljegren said.

Apart from Jane Eyre, many other literary works are studied in the Gothic Literature unit, including "Goblin Market" by Christina Rossetti and The Mad-Woman in the Attic by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. One of the unit's essential questions is, "what is the relationship between the Gothic genre and the domestic sphere?"

The project allows students to explore these concepts further while using creativity to bring a story to life.

Students had a single goal: pick a quote that captures an aspect of the Gothic genre and translate that into an art piece. The possibilities that students could pursue were endless, leading them to explore a plethora of resourceful, innovative, and artistic choices—both in and out of the classroom. For three class periods, students gathered materials and crafted their installations— they gathered many resources to incorporate into their Gothic art.

"My group wanted to showcase the ugliness that [beauty standards] bring out in women. Making women want to transform into this social ideal of what a woman should look like [means that] women end up deforming [themselves] in search of [these standards]," Britney Nakyeyune, a senior taking Women's Literature, said.

The creation of the display case was preceded by lessons where the class read Jane Eyre through the lens of various literary theories.

Ms Liljegren stands with students who created Gothic works in the display room
Photo by Vikram Anantha

"This [allowed] us to consider marginalized identities and perspectives while we read a book that was written by a white woman 175 years ago," Liljegren said. "[I hoped that students would] walk away from this unit armed with new ways of looking at the media they consume."

Her message is echoed and expanded upon by students who adopted new perspectives and ideas while reading Gothic literature and creating their projects.

"We can debunk the myth that Jane Eyre is a heteronormative novel," Defne Olgun, a senior in the Women's Literature class, said.

After approaching Jane Eyre with a comprehensive outlook, students were able to identify ideas that people may not associate with a classic 19th-century novel, such as homosexuality and unorthodox female beauty. Through the display of Gothic artwork, students share these messages with others in Lexington High School.

Welcome Back Ms. Lasa

■ Pranav Chivukula
Ryan Qin
Staff Writers

Laura Lasa started as a student at Lexington High School. After graduating from Springfield College, she returned to LHS as a physical education teacher. Lasa began filling more and more roles at LHS, becoming a dean, associate principal, and in 2012, the principal of LHS before retiring in 2017.

Now, ten years later, she has returned to LHS as a school dean.

"I came in August, just when they were down three deans for different reasons, to be able to fill some of the gaps and hopefully make a dean's transition back pretty easy," Lasa said.

While there have been many changes to the responsibilities of a dean since she originally held the role, Lasa believes the biggest change since her arrival is the school's stressful environment. She recognizes that it is something that both the staff and students are affected by.

"What's different is, without a doubt, the pressure that kids feel to be perfect. When I was here in 1981, or even when I was a student here, that was much more downplayed. That idea that making a mistake is not okay is just prevalent everywhere. It's nobody's fault; it's just in the fabric of the place," Lasa said.

While LHS's current competitive nature is more foreign to Lasa, its environment made Lasa feel like she has returned home.

"[It's] like coming back to a house you lived in for a long time and other people lived there a little bit, so there were parts of it that were really familiar and there were parts of it that were really different," Lasa said.

Now that LHS's deans are returning, Lasa plans to return to retirement. Despite her short stay, Lasa's time in LHS was a meaningful experience.

"The best part of it really, to be honest, was to be able to work with kids again. I really enjoyed that part, and to connect with both old and new colleagues," Lasa said.

Behind the Scenes: Substitute Teachers

■ Lillian Yang
Rebecca Gu
Staff Writers

Substitute teachers play a crucial role at Lexington High School. Every day, they fill in for absent teachers to ensure that all students' learning is uninterrupted.

Each morning, substitute teachers are given schedules that indicate their assigned classes, usually ranging between various grades and subjects. Although each day is packed with different classes, substitute teachers still find their tasks rewarding and enjoyable because of the payoff they receive from helping and communicating with new students every day.

Ellen Cunniffe, an LHS substitute teacher, appreciates not only the effort and passion that students put into their schoolwork, but their respectful behavior and compassion for others.

"[My favorite part of being a substitute is] feeling like I'm contributing in some small way to the learning environment of students. I've worked in other school districts and they're not the quality, the caliber, the politeness of you kids. Any time I meet an LHS parent I say, 'You parents are doing something right; those kids are great'. They're motivated, sweet, and polite," Cunniffe said.

Richard Card, another substitute teacher at LHS, also expresses his gratitude for being able to connect with students by observing or engaging in conversations with them.

"My favorite thing about being a substitute teacher is having conversations with the students and really getting to know them and watching them intellectually come into their own…in terms of just talking to students about what their aspirations are and what drives them," Card said.

Still, Card acknowledges the difficulty of initiating these conversations being a substitute teacher because he has limited time to get to know his students.

"I think it's like walking into a room full of strangers. [...] You don't know what kids to watch out for in some cases and they don't know you. I try to make an effort to reach out and be accessible. Because they don't know you, you have to push it a little bit, but if you can offer help, I think that's always good," Card said.

Cunniffe echoes this sentiment, as she finds her job rewarding when talking to students.

"There's an intellectual stimulation with kids especially here at this school, so that's rewarding for me personally. I love having conversations with kids who are clearly very smart and motivated; it motivates me too," Cunniffe said.

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New Asian American History Classes

Anagha Chakravarti
Erin Suh
Staff Writers

This year, Lexington's Social Studies Department launched an Asian American history class to highlight the experiences of marginalized groups. The new curriculum focuses on racial identity, immigration patterns, and social justice movements, while pushing students to understand the perspectives of underrepresented groups.

The department hoped to build a cohesive curriculum exploring the various facets of the umbrella term "Asian American." Jamie Johannsen, a social studies teacher who helped design the curriculum, discussed the creation of the new course.

"There was a grant that paid for somebody to help us over the summer: James Keita, who is a professor of Asian American history at Bunker Hill Community College. I spent a day working with him and then with teachers and other colleagues at school, and three students also," Johannsen said.

The class tackles questions surrounding Asian American identity and the associated social and political connotations.

"You know, even in that word, 'Asian American'; what does that mean? That was a term that was developed as a political identity to group people from many different Asian ethnicities together in the 1960s. What does it mean to have a course called Asian American history?" Johannsen said.

The course aims to answer this core question and revise students' understanding of what it means to be Asian American.

Johannsen also speaks on the type of environment she would like to create in the classroom to make the course an enriching learning experience for students.

"I think it's a meeting space in school where your history or your identity is being explored. I've heard from students that they appreciate the opportunity to dive into topics that they might not have in other history classes, and to have space to do that in an academic setting where you can have peers and teachers and people to collaborate with," Johannsen said.

Johannsen emphasizes that in-class discussions are a learning opportunity for all, even teachers.

"I'm learning a lot from their analysis and from the ways that they ask questions and think about these topics. The whole course is also a process; we're learning together," Johannsen said.

From the students' point of view, the course has introduced students to the breadth of Asian American history.

"I think a major benefit of taking this class is getting to know history from a different perspective. I can make connections between what we're currently learning in my World History class and the materials in this class. This course covers much of what is not generally talked about in other social studies courses," Taili Gao, a sophomore who takes Asian American History, said.

Students have learned about key events in Asian American history, from the San Francisco State College Strike of 1968 to the immigration of Asians through Angel Island.

"Before taking this class, I didn't really think much about Asian American history, and I didn't know that there is this much to learn about it. Instead of learning history from a European perspective, stories from Asian Americans were presented to me," Gao said.

With a diverse student body, Lexington High School hopes to represent the histories of different racial groups with inclusivity in mind.

"It speaks to the support for students of color—not just students of Asian descent, but students of all identities at the school—to have courses that are going to validate and explore and hold space within the curriculum and within the schedule for those students," Johannsen said.

Ultimately, the addition of the Asian American History elective creates an opportunity for students to dive deeper into a part of history often overlooked in core classes.

Lexington High School Makes Get-Well Cards for Dr. Jean McGuire

Daisy Li
Sanjay Mallikarjun
Staff Writers

In October, members of the Lexington High School community banded together, making get-well cards to support Dr. Jean McGuire during her hospital recovery.

On Oct. 11, McGuire, the co-founder of the METCO program and the first black woman to serve on the Boston School Committee, was stabbed while walking in Boston.

To support McGuire during this difficult time, Melissa Buttaro, a member of the counseling department, and Barbara Hamilton, the director of the school's METCO program, organized the card-making initiative.

"I wanted to talk to people about it but there were no words. If I have no words, how about action? So what can I do? I thought, how about get-well cards?" Butarro said.

Members of the Lexington community received an email regarding the incident and the card-making initiative. Immediately, both faculty members and students volunteered to help.

"I want to make sure that we are supporting [and] encouraging. She's part of our community, part of our education community; I want to support anyone in our community that was harmed," Jessica Sperandio, an art teacher, said.

Like Sperandio, many members of the LHS community are making cards for McGuire. Students have created thoughtful cards in the METCO office, the Counseling Department, and their art classes.

"Folks did a really fabulous job with it. I would come back to my office and read through them, and sit here in tears, because people really put some thought and some heart into it," Buttaro said.

The organizers have emphasized the importance of celebrating McGuire's activism and accomplishments in the cards.

"We're giving her warm greetings for peaceful healing, and thanking her for her work," Buttaro said.

The LHS community hopes the get-well cards will comfort McGuire during her recovery.

"It's important that when people are healing, they know that people are there for them and how much of an impact they made on us," Sperandio said.

Meet Dean Bartlett: The New Language Building Dean

Tara Pai
Victoria Wu
Staff Writers

Sept. 9 was Dean Becky Wilusz's last day as the dean of Lexington High School's Foreign Language building.

The school community deeply appreciated Wilusz during her time at LHS. Marlene Couture, Wilusz's administrative assistant, worked closely with her.

"She was great, I loved working with Dean Wilusz. I thought she did a great job. We got along well; I miss her terribly," Couture said.

After Wilusz's leave, LHS looked for a new dean. Deans must meet with students, families, and staff, which requires strong communication and interpersonal skills.

"Understanding, listening, patience. You've got to understand, you've got to listen to people," Couture said.

Eventually, Linda Bartlett, who worked in the Lexington Public School District for the past eight years as the evaluation team supervisor, was selected for the position. Bartlett reflected on her teaching experiences which influenced her to apply for the position.

"I started as an instructional assistant when my son was young and loved working with students in the school, and got my teaching license because I wanted to be a teacher. I loved being a teacher so I got additional educational certifications, and when I saw the dean position open up, I thought it would be a natural next step to just grow and learn," Bartlett said.

As a parent and educator, Bartlett understands the important qualities of a good dean.

"I'm also a mom of a son who has gone through school, so I understand the role coming from a parent, as a teacher, and now as a dean. The foundation is to love working with students and supporting students' successes. Staying organized and wanting to work with the learning community," Bartlett said.

Bartlett hopes to be a supportive role model for students in the community.

"What I want students to know is that I hope they always feel that they can come to me. I want to be part of their support team, I want to be approachable," Bartlett said.

Dean Wilusz will be missed, but Dean Bartlett is grateful for this new experience.

"I'm very grateful to be in the role of dean now. It is such a great student body and family involvement, and community involvement," Bartlett said.

Derman Cartoon
Cartoon by Srija Ghosh

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Fall Play: The Tempest

Alex Lau
Yi Ling Sha
Staff Writers

This year, Lexington High School's fall play, a production of William Shakspeare's The Tempest, was held from Nov. 17-19. The play follows the story of Prospero, a sorcerer and rightful Duke of Milan, when he conjures up a storm to shipwreck the King of Naples, the King's son Ferdinand, and Prospero's traitorous brother, Antonio. The play conveys a comedic yet gripping story about magic, betrayal, love, and forgiveness.

Preparing for the play required significant work from both the performers and the crew. Students in the play rehearsed every day right after school, sometimes for long hours. Production members who weren't performing directly in the play—costume crew, lighting crew, painters & carpenters, and stage hands—also put in immense efforts to bring the play to life.

"So much passion and care goes into each costume piece, and it's not easy. Sometimes we really have to buckle down and sweat to get the tougher things done," Nicole Liao, a member of the costume crew, said.

However, the production also faced many challenges. Because there weren't enough male actors in the cast, some male roles were played by female students. Prospero, for example, played by Anna Kefalas, was changed into Prospera for the LHS production. Gender bending was a common practice in Shakespeare's time. Other roles, such as the roles of Trinculo (Sophie Sommers) and Stephano (Hattie Fisher), were not genderbent but were played by female actors.

Performers also faced difficulties memorizing due to the play's usage of Shakespearean English. Actors still needed to spend significant time outside of school rehearsing the specific terminology and strict line structures. Furthermore, because the language is difficult for modern audiences, actors must ensure their actions and gestures help communicate the scene.

"[The audience isn't] going to get every word, so we're going to be using a lot of gestures," Aman Verma, a freshman who played a courtier in the play, said.

The production faced these challenges head on. For example, if actors had trouble connecting with their characters, the cast did character building exercises, which helped actors better interpret their roles.

"We did a character building activity at one point, and it was a magical moment for me. I credit it with why I was able to reconnect and feel good about the job I was doing," Lila Sandler, a senior who played Miranda, said.

On an individual level, the play allows actors to flourish as they step out of their normal roles to become someone else.

"When onstage playing [Miranda,] I feel so utterly loved and get to wholly commit myself [to] feeling love for everyone around me. It's beautiful," Sandler said.

On the whole, the fall play brings together students from diverse backgrounds, creating one large caring community that brings the joys of theater to LHS.

"What's most rewarding is that we put a lot of time and effort into this. As a result, people see this finished product and people have a good time. Then, we have a good time performing it," Steve Qi, a junior actor in the play, said.

Artist of the Issue: Singer Phoebe Tian

Ellen Lei
Zahra Karim
Staff Writers

At just three or four years old, Lexington High School senior Phoebe Tian started her journey to become a musician. DNA talent-testing, initiated by her mother, revealed that Tian, who would always tap her feet to songs and sing passionately at karaokes, had a natural inclination to music.

Tian began as a traditional Chinese singer but eventually transitioned to Pop and R&B. She is also a songwriter, writing to advocate for social change and convey her personal experiences.

"The song I wrote last year 'We're Proud to be Asian' enacted a lot of Asian pride that led to rallies, so that's the impact I want to have. And for my personal music, I just want people to relate and I want to speak to those who maybe need help or any emotional connection," Tian said.

In sixth grade, Tian moved from China to the U.S., which allowed her to grow as an Asian-American musician.

"I think the transition culturally and the different performing stages and performance culture in general was a big shift and challenge for me," Tian said. "I really learned a lot from that time period. It made me who I am. Now, I'm not just a Chinese girl. I'm an Asian-American woman and I see myself from both sides."

Tian's favorite aspect of being a singer is performing and bringing joy to others.

"I feel like the thrill of it goes into the adrenaline. I love singing to people and making them happy. I think it's rewarding even though you are a little nervous. At the end, everyone wants you to do well," Tian said.

Aside from singing and songwriting, other aspects of music are important to her life.

"I started picking up different instruments like guitar, piano, drums, songwriting, and music production. It just became a bigger and bigger part of my life that I couldn't just throw away. I felt like it was so essential to my identity that I devoted my everything to it," Tian said.

Phoebe Tian singing at Discovery Day
Photo Provided by Phoebe Tian

Besides being in the LHS all-female acapella group, Guacamole, Tian also founded the LHS Songwriting Club.

"[The club] has a lot of fun together, we fool around, and we do brainstorming, workshopping, share our music, and just like writing and collabing in general," Tian said.

Tian shared her personal experience from her journey with music and also advised aspiring musicians.

"A big thing throughout my music journey was that I had mentors to guide me in the right way. If you want to do music, you need a really big support system and the most important part is definitely yourself. You have to put your real emotions into the music, and really believe in yourself," Tian said.

Tian's latest album, Six-

Mr. Cassedy Accepts Music Teacher of Excellence Award

Emily Wu
Janya Utkarsh
Staff Writers

On Oct. 19, Jared Cassedy, the Lexington Public Schools K-12 Performing Arts Coordinator and Lexington High School Wind Ensemble Conductor, received the Country Music Association (CMA) Foundation's Music Teacher of Excellence award. The event recognizes ten music educators nationally, as well as local teachers in Nashville and across Tennessee.

"[The CMA Foundation Music Teachers of Excellence Gala] took place at Marathon Motorworks in Nashville. The evening was filled with numerous speeches by music industry leaders, Secretary Cardona, and musicians like Kix Brooks (of Brooks and Dunn), culminating with individual recognition of each Music Teacher of Excellence," Cassedy said.

After receiving his award, Cassedy participated in a round-table discussion led by Dr. Miguel Cardona, United States Secretary of Education, to discuss the value of music education. LPS Superintendent Dr. Julie Hackett also attended to show her support for Cassedy's contribution to music education at LHS.

Overall, Cassedy enjoyed his experience during the event as he appreciated the work of music educators across the country.

"This was a really amazing honor! It has made me beyond proud to be part of such an amazing community of educators," Cassedy said.

As the 2015 GRAMMY recipient for Music Education, Mr. Cassedy is already a well-respected teacher within the musical education community. Ever since he was a child, music has been a big part of his life.

"My parents saw the value in such an experience in my sisters and brother's, and my life. We all took piano lessons and played a band instrument. When I played clarinet in my high school band, I not only found a place to express myself musically, but found a community of individuals who were just so very invested in one another both as musicians and as people," Cassedy said.

However, his path towards a music career has not always been straightforward.

"Ironically, when I told my parents I wanted to become a music teacher, they were not thrilled with this decision due to concerns around having a steady career if a school district made budget cuts," Cassedy said.

While an accomplished musician in his own right, Cassedy is firmly devoted to teaching aspiring musicians. Seeing his students grow and develop brings him immense joy.

"This is my 19th year in education and I would still say that the greatest accomplishment I have had as a musician and educator is being provided the opportunity to teach and learn with and from the thousands of students I've been given the chance to work with. Each day is never the same and to see how students progress and develop into the amazing human beings they are is exceptionally satisfying," Cassedy said.

Music teachers close with Cassedy praise his teaching methods.

"Mr. Cassedy's approach is special because he works hard to set a positive tone while also maintaining high expectations for engagement and performance...He doesn't use pressure or stress or consequences to motivate. Instead, he uses encouragement; and his expectations are always fair," Justin Aramati, an LHS music teacher and a colleague of Cassedy, said.

Jared Cassedy
Photo by Sujin Lee

Cassedy firmly believes in the power of music to break barriers and connect people.

"Music is about one thing—us. Music provides us a forum to explore who we are and to take risks, to connect with one another," Cassedy said.

LHS Math Team Looks to MAML for Wins and Accessibility for All

Angela Tang
Jolene (Jianing) Cai
Staff Writers

In Oct., thousands of high school students across Massachusetts took the Massachusetts Association of Mathematics League Competition (MAML).

The competition has two levels. Level one consists of 30 multiple-choice questions that must be completed within 90 minutes. Upon completion, the top 200 scorers are eligible for level two, consisting of seven multi-part proof questions that must be completed within three hours. The top 20 scorers of level two receive cash prizes ranging from $50 to $250.

However, it takes significant preparation to make it to level two. Preparation is mostly done alone, as the MAML format is focused on individual rather than team performance.

"I expect individual team members to prepare on their own…but to add on to that, we're going to do a lot of team practices during math team, and the captains are going to probably try to plan [practices] outside of math team," Jeff Lin, senior captain of Lexington High School's Math Team, said.

But the MAML is a very accessible competition for high schoolers, requiring students to fill out just one sign-up form to participate. Its format is also easier to adjust to for students new to math competitions.

Furthermore, LHS has regularly achieved competitive success in past years, with many students moving to level two and winning first place during the 2022 MAML State Meet.

"In past results, we've definitely done pretty well, and I think that this time we definitely will have something pretty similar… the math team this year is quite strong," Lin said. "I hope we can win some competition... That's the goal."

This year's math team also hopes to achieve many other goals.

"Our general goals are around the same as before: make sure people are having fun [and] trying different things," Kira Tang, another student captain, said.

Tang's personal goal is for math teams to become more accessible to people of different skill levels.

"It's a balance of [the team] being a chill space to hang out…we don't want people to be comparing each other a lot… the culture of comparison often breaks down a lot of goals and rules of the community. I really hope that this year we are able to create a culture where people feel comfortable working together, like a collaborative space," Tang said.

Overall, Tang highlights MAML's ability to give students interested in math competitions an opportunity to showcase their talents and learn from others.

"Me, personally, I've gone on this long journey and I definitely see that I want to help anyone regardless of where they are in the process to feel comfortable and happy to learn more," Tang said.

Two Lexington High School Seniors Attend Marine Energy Research Conference

Annie Yadi Wang
Jiyuan (Daniel) Xu
Staff Writers

Jaime Yu and Anjali Asthagiri, two seniors at Lexington High School, recently participated in a marine energy research conference in Portland, Ore. The University Marine Energy Research Community (UMERC) collaborated with the Marine Energy Technology Symposium (METS) to hold the conference on Sept. 14 and 15. The two students presented their work on energy conversion in thermoelectric oceans.

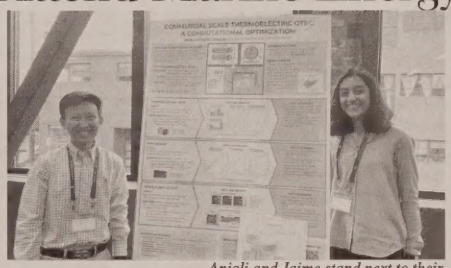
Yu and Asthagiri have worked on this project since June 2021 to provide insight into the possibilities of utilizing renewable energy to combat climate change.

"I think that renewable energy is one of the big problems in our world as we're moving away from fossil fuels and in the face of climate change," Yu said.

Currently, people around the world still use energy from fossil fuels to maintain their lifestyles. However, using nonrenewable energy sources releases greenhouse gasses into the Earth's atmosphere and has harmful consequences. In response to the increasing need to change people's lifestyles, scientists worldwide, like Yu and Asthagiri, have researched possible solutions to the problem.

Yu and Asthagiri's research addresses some of the shortcomings of ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC). OTEC uses the ocean's thermal gradient—a metric that describes the natural difference in temperature of the ocean surface and at its depths. In OTEC, power is generated by the warmer ocean water evaporating in immense heat accumulation pumped from the ocean's surface, which turns the turbine that produces electrical energy. It is then cooled by the ocean water pumped from lower depths. Little is altered in thermoelectric (TE) OTEC, except a moving part used in regular OTEC is eliminated and replaced by a series of tubing. Material thickness, shape, cross-sectional areas, and pipe spacing were all factors taken into consideration by Yu and Asthagiri in maximizing the energy efficiency and heat flow of their TE OTEC system model.

"We concluded that a TE OTEC plant has minimal environmental impacts and can become a competitive renewable energy option in the world today," Yu and Asthagiri said.



Anjali and Jaime stand next to their display at the UMERC+METS conference
Photo by Daniel Kim

Harnessing ocean energy is important to climate change because there are many caveats to contemporary renewable energy sources. Solar panels are an example of this.

"We think that [solar panels are] this great thing, but in reality, we can't actually recycle the silicon dioxide in them," Yu said.

He stated that it is difficult to gain more energy output than input with current energy sources. As a result, scientists, like those at the UMERC conference, are searching for alternative ways to obtain energy. Asthagiri and Yu also attended other meetings during their research process, such as the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). The conferences are often co-run, involving international participants.

"There are professors, there are businessmen from all over the nation," Asthagiri said.

Although global warming affects many communities, the contributions of students like Yu and Asthagiri create hope.

Fun Page: Anagram Cipher

How to play:

Decode the following anagrams.

Each red bolded letter in the decoded word will correspond with the letter in the same place in the scrambled version. The scrambled version's letter is the ciphered letter, and the decoded version's letter is the actual letter.

Use these to decode the ciphered message.
For example:

anagram	t	i	r	k	e	o	a	c	h
decoded word	a	r	t	i	c	h	o	k	e

T would then correspond with A, R with T, O with H, etc. (note: just because T corresponds with A does not necessarily mean A corresponds with T, as you can see R actually corresponds with T here)

The correct letters swapped into the cipher would result in:

cipher	ROTR
deciphered message	THAT

Anagrams:

t r o a d u c e

t c o i n g

n d a e m r

e m t s t p c

t h o a p y r c p r y g

g e v n e r t o u l i n

f a r h w

r n c k y a

Ciphered Message:

UID WLHPU UIHDD SDCSVD UC DEMLV ENPYDUKDFP@TEMLV.ACE FLUI
UID ACHHDAU AHCPPFCHR PCVNULCK FLVV HDADLGD M PSDALMV
ICVLRMO PNHSHLPD ! (KCU M PAME)

A Look Into the Athletics Recruitment Process

Atreya Mallanna
Ryan Asarpour
Staff Writers

This fall, the annual cycle of college athletic recruitment came to a close, marking the end of a year filled with scouting, calls, offers, and decisions.

Lexington High School athletes Alan Zhang, Ava Criniti, and Sean Crogan announced their commitments to the University of Pennsylvania for swimming, Northwestern University for track and field, and Johns Hopkins University for lacrosse, respectively.

Student-athletes typically start receiving attention from colleges during their junior year and occasionally the summer following their sophomore year.

"Sophomore summer going into the junior year is the big recruiting summer, the summer that you play with sidelines packed with recruiting coaches," Crogan said.

However, the recruitment process reaches its peak during the spring of junior year, when communication and official visits escalate.

"Around my junior year, spring was definitely when the recruitment process accelerated … and that was when I started visiting schools on official visits and meeting the team and coaches," Zhang said.

Additionally, Criniti emphasized the importance of coach-athlete communication and the frequent conversations that ultimately convinced her to commit to Northwestern.

"I was in contact with the coach from Northwestern for a while, and I think his communications with me were very helpful. He was really proactive for every chance to meet with me, check in on me, see how the process was going, and I think [he] wanted the best for me, whether that meant going to his school or going to a different school, which really stood out to me," Criniti said.

Crogan attributed his connection with the coach as a significant component in his commitment decision.

"I really clicked with the coach since the first phone call we ever had," Crogan said.

Official school visits play a large role in making commitment decisions. Zhang expressed the valuable experiences and information he gained during these visits.

"They would fly us out for two to three days, and we would live with the teammates, eat with them, train with them a little bit. It helped you get the vibe of the school, and without the official visits, recruiting would be a lot harder because the visits offer you a first-person perspective as to what going to that school really feels like," Zhang said.

College commitment is only the beginning of these athletes' journeys.

"I know it's just the start and that I have to keep working hard. I can't slack off now just because I am committed; I need to keep putting in the work, if not more," Crogan said.

Girls Swim Team Crowned Middlesex League Champions

Alex Fan
Aditi Kalia
Staff Writer

The Lexington High School Girls Varsity Swim Team capped off their undefeated regular season at the Middlesex League Championships on Oct. 27, winning their first title in ten years.

After a season full of adversity last year, the returning girls were determined to bounce back.

"Last year we were definitely a lot slower, but this year we got really hyped and we also have a lot of fast freshmen and sophomores that just joined," Juliana Hilderbrand, a junior on the team, said.

However, the journey wasn't always smooth; in addition to their rigorous school schedules, team members had to endure early morning practices at 5:30 a.m. every day for three months.

LHS Girls Varsity Swim Team
Provided by Cynthia Pfeiffer

"I think that the hardest part was girls would be sleeping past their alarms and missing practice because they were so tired … or [having] a lot of people getting sick. We've had a lot of struggles, but we got through them," PJ Gruskin, a senior captain, said.

Nonetheless, the team stuck together and encouraged each other at all times, which Gruskin believes contributed to their success.

"It's such a hard-working group of girls. They've kept a smile on their face and keep showing up, so I have so much respect for them …We had one meet where all these girls were trying to make the cut times. The pool was so loud. Everybody made it and I know it's just because of the endless support that they got when the team found out they were trying to make the cut time," Gruskin said.

Even out of the pool, the team continued to engage in team bonding, including team spirit days.

"The most chaotic one was sharks and minnows. During second block, I walked by three different sharks, who probably all saw me, but I managed to evade them by hiding," Natalie Schroeder, a junior on the team, said.

Their most notable victories include ending their twelve-year losing streak to Acton-Boxborough and defeating the Winchester team to take the Middlesex league title.

"It was down to the wire, but throughout the entire meet [we were] tied. It was our last relay, so everyone's freaking out because we didn't even know we were going to be this close—it never occurred to us. And then we ended up winning. It was awesome. It was great," Gruskin said.

At the end of the meet, the girls celebrated their win like a team as well.

"We were getting hyped up by our coaches and then we started hyping each other up. We all clumped together holding hands… screaming so loudly and jumping up and down," Hilderbrand said.

For many of the girls on the team, especially the seniors, the culmination of team dinners, long bus rides, and working hard together to win a championship made the season so memorable.

"I think senior year just doesn't compare. The way the team is bonded, and also [that] it's the first time the

More School Spirit at LHS Football Games

Nora Kapoor
Nolan An
Staff Writers

This year, Lexington High School football games have seen an increase in school spirit. These displays of spirit, including wearing all pink for breast cancer awareness, neon clothing, and construction-themed clothing, have created a more unified LHS community.

The LHS Hype Squad, led by co-presidents PJ Gruskin, Alara Rago, and Isabel Lensmire, is at the forefront of these developments. The club aims to promote school spirit and create an inclusive community. One of their core beliefs is that spreading school spirit provides a source of motivation for the team.

"I think that a huge part of the games is cheering them on. It's a lot easier to do that when everyone is wearing something that helps hype you up when you're at that game and shows the collectiveness of everyone there," Rago said.

Lensmire also described how the accessibility of school spirit is crucial to bringing LHS together.

"It's something that's accessible by anything, like people can obviously take it as far as they want. That's a personal decision, but we want it to feel like something people are able to do and enjoy," Lensmire said.

Additionally, social media plays an important role in spreading awareness of spirit weeks across LHS.

"We tried to take a picture of anybody who allowed us to, and we tried to post pictures of people around LHS wearing the spirit," Gruskin said. "I think the main thing is that when people see other people doing it or how many other people did it, it just grows from there. By the end of the week, almost everybody was doing it."

Nelson Stephen, the starting quarterback of the LHS Varsity Football Team, accentuated how school spirit motivates the team's drive to win for their school.

"You walk down the halls and you see everybody who says, 'Oh, they're gonna be there tonight.' That brings everyone together. Watching the team play and hopefully bring the dub home, it brings the school together," Stephen said.

This increase in school spirit has resulted in more excitement before football games, but also a larger sense of unity among the different communities within LHS.

"At the end of the day, you're playing for the name in front of your jersey, rather than the bag," Stephen said. "So you're playing for Lexington and seeing the people of Lexington come out and support you and have the spirit guys are just as important as the people in the field."

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